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The White Woman's Burden: "Feminist" War Rhetoric and the Phenomenon of Co-optation

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ABSTRACT *This article takes a critical stance towards the rhetoric of protecting and liberating Afghan women in the wake of the "war on terror", in this paper called "feminist" security rhetoric. An increased gender awareness in general and in relation to war in particular has influenced the ways in which war stories have been expressed over the last two decades. References to UN Resolution 1325, on women and security in post-conflict situations, will serve as both an indication and illustration of "feminist" security rhetoric, the co-optation phenomenon included, a practice that absorbs the meanings of the original concepts to fit into the prevailing political priorities. The rhetoric of the former Norwegian defence minister, Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, is presented as a case study of this phenomenon. The Norwegian (and the Nordic) gender equality model has mainly been analysed from a welfare perspective, seldom from a post-colonial war(fare)/peace perspective. By analysing Norwegian "feminist" security rhetoric, I also want to push feminist rhetoric to create a space that is sensitive to post-colonial perspectives as well as political philosophy. I thereby intend to question both cultural relativism and aggressive cosmopolitanism dressed in various feminized outfits, aiming instead to suggest some common ground for feminist post-colonial voices to meet the voices of Western feminists who oppose the tendency to see whole cultures as internally homogeneous and almost externally sealed. These voices may together constitute a potent oppositional discourse to Western feminized security rhetoric.*

The protection-of-women-and-children scenario is a common part of war rhetoric and has always been so (Enloe 1990, 2004; Yuval-Davis 1997; Tickner 2001; see also Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Nation-states today have added the use of gender equality rhetoric, or a specific feminist rhetoric, to this scenario in order to mobilize support for war (Abu-Lughod 2002; Eisenstein 2002; Ferguson 2005; Eduards 2007).

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There are several tensions within such rhetorical tightrope balancing, a balancing between the protection/victimization scenario and the liberation/gender equality scenario. Some of these tensions will be addressed in this article.

In order to give shape to a rhetorical analysis, the aim of this article is to explore the use of certain kinds of "feminist" arguments in the Norwegian debates on the Afghanistan war, especially the co-optation of a liberal feminist rhetoric used to support and underline the potency of Resolution 1325, taken by the Security Council in October 2000, a year before the "war on terror" began. This resolution was seen by many feminists as a watershed for women and a challenge to the "women and children as helpless victims" construct (Enloe 1999). The women-as-agents rhetoric contained the potential to become something more than "mere rhetoric".

A feminist liberal rhetoric demands different acrobatic qualities among the Western power elites, be they males or females (Lippe 2007; Lippe & Väyrynen 2011). The Norwegian UN-related rhetoric is a subtle form of benevolent philanthropic activity, an activity apparently without reference to any post-colonial protection scenario framing. The rhetorical approach to "feminist" rhetoric used by Norwegian social democrat female defence ministers, and the specific interpretations of the resolution as a tool to achieve gender equality by military means, will indicate how feminist aims may be taken up and co-opted in ways that are deeply problematic. Limited as this perspective may be, it will, hopefully, have relevance for similar narratives in other countries, because of the common tendency to equate gender equality with Western liberal democracies.

Co-optation occurs when basic concepts, during their interaction with other usually stronger policy/military strategic priorities and objectives, become absorbed and the original meanings of the concepts are neutralized. In this paper it thus becomes important to explore how concepts that enable transformation and the greater inclusion of women become enmeshed within frameworks that discipline them to specific causes; causes which have effects that are centred upon violence and exclusion. Not only may "feminist" rhetoric be co-opted to gain support for Resolution 1325—and for military/strategic purposes—but the opposite is also true; the resolution also becomes part of the same co-optation processes and used for similar reasons. Co-optation thus occurs at several levels as it transforms feminist ideas by combining gender equality and women's rights with various discourses, from democracy discourse to war/security, gender equality, and human rights discourses.

Tied to a "localized", i.e. Western, understanding of women's experiences and agency, this rhetoric may be seen as a tool to constrain—if not eliminate—alternatives to liberal democratic models or frames. The use of feminist ideas by Western neo-conservative, liberal, and/or social democrat administrations thus differs from gendered war/security rhetoric in the past. A perceived "post-feminist achievement", equated with the full realization of gender equality in opposition to an illiberal and gender-oppressive generalized Islam, serves, in various ways, as a post-colonial framing of Afghan women in Western protection scenarios (Narayan & Harding 2000; Abu-Lughod 2001).

I argue that the Norwegian rhetorical use of this resolution represents an orientalist gaze which neither tries to see "the other" nor understands or sees its own subject position. A feminist rhetoric of benevolent philanthropy, a "what can we do

for Afghan women?" rhetoric—and perspective—will be scrutinized by analysing whose voices are heard and listened to, whose agency is highlighted, and how basic concepts such as equality, adequate representation, or full participation are co-opted to fit into the hegemonic discourse of international relations (IR).

When, more than two decades ago, Gayatri Spivak asked: "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988), as I see it, she invited scholars within the rhetorical field(s) to see links between rhetorical and post-colonial disciplines. This paper contains three parts. In what follows I shall outline a critical approach to liberal "feminist" war/security rhetoric by referring to Ferguson's (2005) analysis of US war/security rhetoric and the reframing of liberal feminist concepts, linking her perspective to Norwegian rhetoric. Despite some differences, the risk of the rhetorical use of liberal feminist ideas becoming "a nasty little weapon" of imperialism, to borrow an expression used by Spivak (2001: 17), is great. Putting ourselves in the position of the other, the rhetoric of benevolent philanthropy often fails to exhibit the patience and respect necessary to weave disparate perspectives together. I will also illustrate how aspects of Cheryl Glenn's (2004) studies on the rhetoric of silence(s) may add some important insights to what is meant by speaking on behalf of and in place of somebody whose protection, liberation, and security one claims to represent. Taking Operation Enduring Freedom as the point of departure, those who are silenced are Afghan women in general and Afghan women living in Afghanistan in particular.

From here, the step to the phenomenon of co-optation is a short one. Similar to "feminist" rhetoric or the reframing of feminist ideas, co-optation not only illustrates how the meanings of the original concepts are absorbed and neutralized to fit into prevailing political priorities and discourses, but it also illustrates (aspects of) the rhetorical "feminization" process as well as the potential effects of liberal feminist war/security rhetoric (Stratigaki 2005).

Taken-for-granted assumptions, categorizations, and conceptualizations on gendered security issues will also be analysed as part of the wider globalization phenomenon. This "wider phenomenon" is a global polity that is taken for granted according to the dominant ideology of liberalism, both economic and political, a background assumption that Shepherd calls an "absent presence" (Shepherd 2008). The presence of women and the increased gender awareness on war, peace, and security issues, on the other hand, have inspired me to paraphrase this concept as "present absences", an idea that will be discussed in the final part of the theoretical section.

This part will serve as theoretical door-opener(s). I will first, very briefly, give voice to Marit Nybakk, leader of the Norwegian Defence Committee from 2001 to 2005. She introduced a specific, aggressive "feminist" war rhetoric that was soon followed up by the Norwegian defence minister from 2005 to 2009, Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, and today's defence minister, Grete Faremo. These women all apply feminist rhetoric, albeit somewhat differently, in their war stories addressed to the public. I have, however, focused mainly on Strøm-Erichsen's stories, to illustrate the rhetorical co-optation of Resolution 1325, as Nybakk never referred to it and Faremo only rarely does.

In the final part, liberal "feminist" war/security rhetoric will be discussed from post-colonial perspectives, perspectives that deconstruct and vehemently oppose

Western scenarios of "protecting" and "liberating" Muslim women, even with military means. In her essay "Terror: A speech after 9–11", (2004) Spivak describes the "war on terror" as synonymous with global civil war and emphasizes its coercive rhetoric of cultural incommensurability. She argues that the war on terror is part of an alibi that every imperialism has given itself, a civilizing mission carried to the extreme. What post-colonial readings of global civil war have in common, according to Spivak, is their desire to respond to war in a moral fashion. Her voice, although, or rather precisely because, it is ambiguous, indicates the threads embedded throughout this article, linking the final part, the "white woman's burden", to the earlier parts. These voices may together constitute a potent oppositional discourse to Western liberal feminist war/security rhetoric (Abu-Lughod 2003; Jaggar 2005; Chowdhry 2007).

Liberal feminist rhetoric—silence and co-optation

Liberal feminist war/security rhetoric, the use of feminist ideas for instrumental purposes, is, according to Ferguson, based on a rhetorical and representational model of framing. Transporting pre-existing feminist ideas into new contexts, feminist rhetoric is introduced into a discursive context in which other frames are already operative (Ferguson 2005: 14; Ferguson uses the term "feminized" rhetoric). This "feminist" rhetoric is, as already indicated, based on a concern with women's oppression abroad, real or perceived, based upon the presumption that the women's movement in Western countries successfully achieved its goals long ago (see also Parry-Giles & Blair 2002; Flanders 2004). Ferguson highlights how the Bush Administration used and transformed feminist ideas by combining gender equality and women's rights with human rights discourses, thus highlighting a moral dimension in the war/security story.

A feminist war/security rhetoric is based on a rhetorical and representational model of framing, where frames are conceptual structures that enable us to make sense of information by selectively presenting it from a particular viewpoint. Relying on a morally based idea of gender equality, rather than a political or historical one, may "motivate and justify intervention abroad in the name of women's rights", Ferguson suggests (Ferguson 2005: 20; see also Shepherd 2006). Avoiding explicitly morally based values as well as "we" and "our" opposed to "they" and "their", the presumption of a domestic "post-feminist achievement" in Norwegian protection-liberation scenarios is, as will be illustrated in the next part, present at a more latent level and probably with greater rhetorical credibility than in the rhetoric of Laura Bush or the neo-conservative Bush Administration. Protection-liberation scenarios can be constructed in multiple ways. The suggestion of "post-feminist achievement", equated with "our" full realization of gender equality in opposition to the gender-oppressive, generalized "their", is not explicitly expressed, although present as the subject position from which the Norwegian politicians speak, and offers no power of agency to the "other" women, in this case women in Afghanistan (Lippe 2011; Lippe & Väyrynen 2011).

Glenn's focus on the rhetoric of silence adds one more dimension to an understanding of how to challenge liberal feminist rhetoric. The question is not only

whether speech or silence is more productive, effective, or appropriate, but rather, Glenn argues, when each is self-selected and when it is imposed (Glenn 2002, 2004).

> When silence is our rhetorical choice, we can use it purposefully and productively—but when it is not our choice, but someone else's for us, it can be insidious, particularly when someone else's choice for us comes in the shape of institutional structure. To wit, a person can choose silence, but the choice isn't really hers because speaking out will be professional suicide. In short, she's been disciplined—and silenced. (Glenn 2002: 263–264)

Glenn is discussing rhetoric and silence within North American culture. Silence may be a means of survival or a conscious method of resistance. When silence is broken but there is nobody to listen, one's value as a human being seems to be nil (Glenn 2004). As Jacqueline Jones Royster puts it: "What I am compelled to ask, when veils seem more like walls, is who has the privilege of speaking?" (Royster 1996: 36). Or, who has the privilege of speaking for Afghan women? The veiling of Afghan women is about much more than the burqa; more important for most Afghan women are those veils which "seem more like walls". The rhetoric of the veil—or the rhetoric of silence—occurs when the speaking subjects speak on behalf of and in place of Afghan women, more or less erasing their subjectivity, so that they then become helpless objects to be rescued by us.

Cynthia Enloe (2004: 19–42) gives examples to illustrate yet another aspect of the rhetoric of silencing gender. There has to be a group with sufficient power to create a centre, which means that some other individual or group belongs to the margin. Enloe writes:

> There is yearly and daily business of maintaining the margin where it currently is and the center where it now is. It is harder for those at the alleged center to hear the hopes, fears and explanations of those in the margins, not because of physical distance—the margin may be two blocks from the White House … but because it takes resources and access to be heard where it matters. (Enloe 2004: 20)

From "the centre", be it Washington, London, Paris, Berlin, or Oslo, Afghan people seem to be situated at the very margin. Both Afghan men and women, men as potential terrorists or potential collaborators and friends, and women in need of Western protection, have been silenced, marginalized, erased, and stereotyped in different ways and with different consequences (Ayotte & Husain 2005). A quotation from the book, *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*, may highlight aspects of how—or why—this rhetoric is relevant in a Norwegian and Nordic context:

> The lure of an enterprise as powerful and authoritative as the Western civilising project, attracts even those who never belonged to its centre or were its main agents. Nations, groups and individual subjects are drawn by the promise of power to adopt the discourses, imaginaries and material benefits connected to

> this project. The Nordic countries see themselves as part of the Western world, drawing their value systems from the Enlightenment, and showing themselves to be willing to defend these values sometimes even more forcefully than the former colonial centres. (Keskinen et al. 2009: 1)

Women, so often at the margins of the international arena, are more likely to drown in, than wave from, the mainstream, unless they swim with the current. Female Nordic politicians in positions of power seldom wave from the mainstream; neither do the Norwegians (Lippe & Väyrynen 2011).

Because concepts such as democracy, gender equality, and women's liberation allow for multiple conflicting interpretations, space is created for feminist rhetoric, including empty declarations. Gender equality is seldom explicitly opposed and may easily become an idea to which lip-service is paid. Co-optation, according to Stratigaki (2005), is a common discursive, rhetorical, and linguistic practice that does more than simply reframe feminist ideas; it also does more than absorb and neutralize the meanings of complex concepts to fit into hegemonic political discourses. Co-opting feminist ideas has further implications. By using the original as well as the transformed concept as an alibi, co-optation often works against mobilization and pressure by interested parties and individuals (Stratigaki 2005: 36).

The process through which negotiations or concepts pass might be seen as a filtering machine through which concepts and meanings are dealt with, as Stratigaki (2005) has so brilliantly illustrated. Conceptually transformed by their subordination to different policy priorities, the co-optation of ideas tends to result in a loss of their potential for changing gender relations. Processes in operation and texts need to be the outcome of debates over meanings for any consensus to be reached by the multiple actors. Different phases reflect different policy frames and therefore different choices in specific policies and selective use of existing policy instruments. Complex and diverse political ideas are thereby easily co-opted into a logic that functions to sustain the legitimacy of the economic-political system and geo-political power structures as a whole.

I relate this process to a wider context whereby ideas of the liberal democratic peace have become central to conflict resolution (Richmond 2009). Laura J. Shepherd's (2008) concept "absent presences"—be they historically constituted or contemporary silences—manifested by contradictions and biases in narratives, and exposing taken-for-granted assumptions, categorizations, and conceptualizations, represent power and politics "at work". These "absent presences" are used to illustrate why issues of women, peace, and security need to be analysed as part of the wider globalization phenomenon. According to Shepherd, the unproblematic reproduction of this globalization ideology makes possible a hegemonic project of liberal globalization, closely tied to the concept of global governance (2008: 398). It is here that the presence of women and women's rights has increasingly found legitimacy, for example, through the emergence of specific initiatives such as the passing of Resolution 1325. This kind of social transformation, a top-down restructuring, alongside an emphasis on the participation, representation, and protection of women, may be seen not only as a contradiction in terms but also as an

absent presence: absent because seldom opened up for critical scrutiny (see also Orford 2002; Lippe 2003).

As the traditionally gendered gender, women are brought into view—their presence, the possibilities for agency, and the particular circumstances that shape their experience as presence are to a large extent transformed, resulting in an absence. This is both a continuation and a reshaping of more traditional terms of participation. Women's presence in the field of security seems rather to be a guarantee for the more overarching demands of the institution of Western neo-liberal governance. It "draws discursive power from seemingly inevitable logic of neoliberal globalization discourse, effectively proscribes the possibility of reimaging development, prescribes its unproblematized undertaking" (Shepherd 2008: 398; see also Shepherd 2005).

Images of a "post-feminist achievement" then easily tend to be equated with the full realization of gender equality as a norm—as opposed to Islamic practice in general—and, at least to some extent, "thoughts are already thought through" (Keskinen et al. 2009: 12–13). The investments in a universal emancipatory politics may work to constrain critical feminist or otherwise interrogations of both government policies and global political environments, which creates fertile arenas for this kind of feminist war/security rhetoric to succeed (Eisenstein 2002; Cloud 2004).

Liberal Norwegian co-optation of feminism

The characteristics of Norwegian war rhetoric should also be seen from the perspective of the history of Norwegian foreign policy. The decision to enter into military alliances was taken after World War II, i.e. with Norway's NATO membership in 1949, and since then Norway has loyally acted together with the USA. According to Norwegian policy rhetoric, Norway does not take part in war or warfare; it happens, though, that the country takes part in military operations (Leira 2005; Kanerva 2008).

This narrative cherishes the idea that Norway has a long-standing tradition of participation in UN-led peace-keeping activities, conflict prevention through political dialogue, mediation, and overseas development aid on a large scale (Ingebritsen 2002; Leira 2005; Leira & Neumann 2007). This also characterizes Norwegian foreign policy rhetoric in 2011, nearly ten years after Operation Enduring Freedom began. For Norway to uphold successfully this narrative alongside its historical loyalty towards the USA, a specific rhetorical elegance is needed.

Although official Norwegian (and Nordic) feminist ideology is based upon—and strongly geared towards—gender equality, one may simultaneously see traces of gendered essentialism; women and men are assumed to be both equal and different (Skjeie & Teigen 2003; Bråten 2004, 2010). The welfare society allows women to have influence in social and political life but without challenging the increased marketization/privatization or neo-liberal economic policy in Norway (Østerberg et al. 2011). Gender justice is considered synonymous with gender balance, according to the principle of a 50/50 gender balance—an implicit normative principle of

Norwegian gender equality policy (Fraser 2003; Holst 2007). The focus is on "micro-politics" rather than global power structures.

However, feminist scholars inquiring into the intersections between gender and ethnicity have introduced the term "gender-equal Norwegianness". This concept indicates a critique of the presumed taken-for-granted connection of gender equality with regard to ethnic minority groups (Berg et al. 2010: 12–13; see also Keskinen et al. 2009). According to this criticism, representatives of ethnic minorities and migrants are being perceived as non-liberated social subjects, and ethnic minority women are considered to need "our" help to obtain gender equality. The particular form of "patronizing rationality", or seeking to save "brown women from brown men", may, of course, influence public rhetoric, liberal feminist war/security rhetoric included (Lippe & Väyrynen 2011).

In August 2002, with a right-wing government in power (2001–2005), the social democrat leader of the defence committee, Marit Nybakk, started her campaign (un-) safely within the frames of liberal and equity feminist tradition, nevertheless failing to create any subject position or unspoken silences to be spoken that would allow a true polyphony on the rationale of Norway's foreign policy towards Afghanistan (Nybakk 2002). Rather, a co-optation took place when, at a very early stage during the war in Afghanistan, she appropriated the Western hegemonic discourse. Her slogan during the first years of the "war on terror" was: "This is a war of liberation—liberation for Afghan women". From this declaration, her arguments were built and her conclusion made: "Therefore this war is a necessary war" (Nybakk 2002). Thus, Nybakk's only deviation from orthodox Norwegian rhetoric was her explicit use of war—a "feminist liberation" war—embedded in her rather aggressive rhetoric.

The rhetoric of Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, social democrat minister of defence (2005–2009), was more subtle than Nybakk's. And, in contrast to Nybakk, she was balancing on a softer rhetorical tightrope—a balance between benevolent altruism and patronizing rationality. A frequently used vehicle helping her to succeed in the art of persuasion was her references to Resolution 1325.

In her speech to the European Union members on security in Brussels 2006, Strøm-Erichsen performed a magical act of tightrope balancing, panegyrically embracing all Western-dominated institutions (Strøm-Erichsen 2006). Avoiding any explicit war rhetoric at home but, on the other hand, representing Norway's and Norwegians' trust and serious engagement in both EU and ESDP[1] operations, she had to balance soft and hard rhetoric carefully. "Norway's participation in the EU Battle Groups Concept is a key element in our contribution to the ESDP". In front of this audience, her rhetoric may be called loyalty rhetoric, similar to the rhetoric of a brave and trustworthy pupil addressing a group of highly respected teachers.

However, underscoring the need to improve NATO–EU relations, NATO–EU–WTO (World Trade Organization) co-operation, and the value of the strategic partnership, she approached security challenges and the complexities of peace-keeping and peace-building, paying specific attention to the war in Afghanistan: "First, the international community must coordinate civilian efforts in a better way. Today the civilian aspects of our engagements, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, are often fragmented and uncoordinated. This means that the overall results are less effective." The international community as one sole body, one actor, is here a

gender-neutral body. This body must, however, act as one body. Only then will "the overall results" be really effective. No antagonism exists between "the military body" and "the civilian body". The activities that the body in her speech is asked to perform are "engagements", and concepts or euphemisms like engagements serve to hide potential antagonisms embedded in her eulogy to the audience.

"Second," she continues, "development cannot take place without the necessary level of security. There needs to be close cooperation between NATO, the EU and the UN, as well as with other international actors, including NGOs." Here "engagements" are defined as "development", the "international community" is named by Western institutional references only, and "security" is only introduced at this stage. The body is still "one body", which should only be improved.

Strøm-Erichsen finally turns to the UN resolution that urges all member states to pay attention to women's role in new peace support operations. Praising the EU's decision to act in line with Resolution 1325, she assumes the role of teacher and tells her audience that the EU is now also acting in accordance with the Norwegian principle in the Afghan engagement, an engagement that is gender-sensitive at all levels. And Norway "... puts great emphasis on the UN resolution and has adopted a national action plan to promote gender issues". Norway, here represented by Strøm-Erichsen, seems to be the head of the European body, reaching out its philanthropic hands to civilians in need of security. Women are present, and so is Resolution 1325; any challenge to hegemonic discourse is, however, absent. The Western security scenario seems rhetorically secured, even as the agency of Afghan women is manifestly absent.

This rhetorical use of the UN resolution may be seen as a subtle form of feminist co-optation, constructed along the following lines of reasoning: Norway is participating in Afghan peace operations. The resolution stresses the importance of women as participants in peace-building. Norway is thus participating in establishing gender equality for Afghan women. The Norwegian minister is promoting both gender equality issues and the Norwegian interpretation of participation in warfare. This rhetoric is also a subtle way of silencing both the voices and the agency of Afghan women. The gender mainstreaming is so mainstreamed that the resolution easily fits into most war stories, no matter what is being referred to. At this stage in her speech, present absences are made manifest at nearly all levels. What is absent, but present in her speeches, articles, and texts addressed to the Norwegian public, is the urge for an increased presence of women in the armed forces when reference to the resolution is made. The "post-feminist" achievement embedded in this "feminist" rhetoric, is, however, the same taken-for-granted authoritative subject position from where to grasp the resolution.

On 11 November 2007, and in front of mainly Norwegian (female) peace researchers in Oslo, she gives an extraordinary illustration of the rhetorical manoeuvre of co-optation (Strøm-Erichsen 2007). Having told the audience about her multiple visits to Afghanistan, she takes an extraordinary rhetorical step (for a minister of defence):

> I am sure I am not the only person here to have been moved by the stories about the hardships and faiths of the two female characters, Mariam and Laila, in

> Khaled Hosseini's book *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). Unfortunately, their tragic stories, which include domestic, social and even state violence, are only too realistic and representative (Strøm-Erichsen 2007).

Referring to splendid and touching literature about Afghan women—and men—early in her speech, she invites her audience to enter a fictional world, a world and a story probably more realistic than the stories she herself and her colleagues are telling the Norwegian public. Highlighting several improvements for Afghan women (and children), such as hospitals and education for women and girls, step by step she prepares the ground from which she can explicitly refer to the resolution:

> It is imperative that we also reach out to the female part of the population in Afghanistan. There are several elements to this. First, we need to see this from a justice perspective. If we are in Afghanistan to improve the lives of the Afghan population, we cannot succeed if it is only the male part of the population that benefits from improvements (Strøm-Erichsen 2007).

Her promotion of benevolent philanthropy is indeed a rhetorical tightrope balancing—after what was then six years of military operations. Despite the multiple positive achievements regarding Afghan women, it is, at this stage of the speech, imperative to reach out to "the female part of the population" and not "only to the male part". The risk of losing the rhetorical art of balancing seems secondary to her primary goal, which is further elaborated when she continues: "In 'old-fashioned' operations, the aim was to remove or replace the leadership of a country. In today's operations, the aim is to transform and assist a society and an elected government." Old wars, i.e. "old-fashioned operations", are thus contrasted with "modern" wars. From Nybakk's potent rhetoric of a necessary war, Strøm-Erichsen represents herself as a benevolent matriarch assisting a society as well as an elected government. Neither "society" nor "government" is gendered. By silencing the strongly gendered structures in Afghanistan, she makes it possible to continue her rhetorical performance towards the resolution.

Highlighting the importance of collaboration with civil society and the "Afghanization" of the "operation", the resolution is now explicitly brought to the forefront: "The mantra in this is the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which stresses the important role of female personnel in international security operations. We do not have enough women in our armed forces. This is a challenge at the top of my agenda as defence minister." Legitimating her rhetoric, she then uses the most common vehicle for both persuasion and identification to take place by adding: "I believe that being a woman is in itself a quality and competence that will improve a male-dominated military organization".

What is not challenged is the way in which the resolution at this final stage is "naturally" linked to the necessity of an increased number of women in the army: "In Afghanistan we see how important female personnel are in order to relate to the female part of the population. Our male soldiers cannot build these relations." Now it is a "we" who see the necessity of females in the armed forces, doing this by highlighting a complementary gender perspective, an aspect or a dimension of

essentialism—equal but different. "A feminized or feminist army and a feminized or feminist war?" one may ask. The minister does not ask this; neither does she ask if the identification attributed to "us" by Afghan women is an identification as peace-builders and liberators or as occupiers. This could at least have been of some interest. She omits exactly what Cynthia Enloe underlines: "... when on occasion women's liberation is wielded instrumentally by any masculinised elite as a rationale-of-convenience for their own actions, we should go on high alert; they'll put back on the shelf of not only a nation this rationale-of-convenience just as soon as it no longer serves their deeper, longer-range purpose" (Enloe 2004: 263).

In the co-optation process, the co-opted concepts are not necessarily rejected; the initial meaning, which has been transformed and used in policy discourse for a different purpose than the original one, may not even be perceived or recognized. Gender awareness and "good will" are, though, not sufficient and are no guarantee of complying with the resolution's "good intentions" or liberating potency. Moreover, the danger of co-optation is greater in large organizations and in particular if there is a high level of normative legitimacy for the general principle underlying the original policy goal. "Today," Stratigaki notes, "European politicians of all parties pay lip service to gender equality as a fundamental principle of democracy and social justice" (Stratigaki 2005: 37). In the long run, co-optation can even produce a counter-effect and a negative impact: "It is difficult to mobilize against a claim that appears to be one's own even if it no longer is used to mean what one intended" (Stratigaki 2005: 36). When it comes to global power structures and the USA's role as superpower (though challenged), the co-optation process takes one step further: it is difficult to compete with military and economic interests. These interests are absent—in the presence of Resolution 1325.

In the long run, and in the empirical material presented in this paper, a "run" of some years only, any mobilization of an increased gender awareness has failed to occur. The ethos of President Obama, Commander-in-Chief of US military forces in the global "war on terror" and receiver of the Norwegian Nobel Peace Prize in December 2009, is still strong in Norway 2011. Strøm-Erichsen's successor, Grete Faremo, has in some ways an easier rhetorical activity to perform than her predecessor, partly because of the "new Commander-in-Chief", and partly because the difficult feminist tightrope balancing seems to be of less importance than previously, due to an increased awareness of a "mission not accomplished".

In a speech in May 2010, she begins by presenting a historical overview of women's liberation and their progress in Norway, underlining her own experiences as a woman and thereby establishing a point of contact with the audience, important vehicles for her rhetoric to be successful (Faremo 2010). Thus, in some subtle way, Faremo represents herself as—and probably becomes—bodily evidence of a Norwegian post-feminist achievement. She is now able to open a window onto Afghanistan through the following rhetorical performance: "... in some areas where Norwegian defence is engaged, we have learned that our male soldiers have difficulties in reaching out to women. Resolution 1325 encourages members of the UN to increase the number of women in peace-building operations." Those who are appellated as actors are Norwegian women, building a peace that Afghan women are supposed to welcome. No subject position is opened for Afghan voices to be heard or listened to, neither is

any subject position for Afghan women's agency suggested. Those who are present, physically or symbolically, here gain their potency from those who are absent. "Present absences" work alongside "absent presences", i.e. an invisible alignment to hegemonic discourse. Any explicit analogy between Norwegian and Afghan history is avoided, but the former has probably served as a potent rhetorical reference. And the "difficulties" experienced by "our" male soldiers in reaching out to Afghan women are quickly minimized both by the resolution as an "encouraging factor" and the fact that "female soldiers constitute 12% of Norwegian staff in Afghanistan".

Marit Nybakk's aggressive rhetoric of "a necessary women's liberation war" nearly a decade ago seems in 2011 to have disappeared from the collective memory, so has Strøm-Erichsen's feminist rhetoric of benevolent philanthropy. Today's "armed conflict" in Afghanistan is no longer international, and Faremo has become the Norwegian minister of an "engagement" called Afghanization. Antonyms become synonyms. War is peace, warfare or killing is peace-building, soldiers are peace-builders, regression becomes progress, and an increased number of female Norwegian soldiers will be part of that progress.

The global spread of Western civilization has become a threat for most Afghans, not least for Afghan women. To swim against this current without drowning is a difficult discipline—a discipline and an activity "the white woman" does not have to learn. The silencing of Afghan women's voices—and agency—seems sufficiently hidden in the doxic room, and powerful Norwegian women would rather let the current do the work. Western liberal feminist rhetoric, Norwegian rhetoric included, remains lost in tradition, although dressed in post-modern "post-feminist achievement" clothing—fulfilling the logic of present absence.

The white woman's burden

Referring to *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in the speech analysed above, Strøm-Erichsen silenced the agency and heroic bravery of the male as well as female Afghan characters. She chose to render the male characters, who risked their lives by supporting, protecting, and empowering their female friends and family members, invisible and non-existent. She thus omitted the collaboration and mutual trust between some of the male and female characters. Co-optation and reframing does indeed occur at different levels and in various contexts—thus facilitating feminist rhetoric to succeed—up until now.

The Western "improving eye" in Norwegian "feminist" rhetoric is manifested by the perspective—and "gender equality-improving eyes"—of powerful Norwegian women, who avoid seeing the war on terror as an arena for the USA's/NATO's and Norway's own strategic and profitable interests. Norwegian "feminist" rhetoric leaves no subject positions, no discursive room, for the agency of Afghan women. The liberator/liberated or protector/protected relationship is by definition unequal, and unequal relations rest ultimately on the threat or act of violence. For the liberators and protectors to wield this public superiority, there must be a certain constructed "liberated" and "protected" (Stiehm 1982). In the real world, the relation between protector and protected is often experienced as a relation between oppressors and

nobody—no body—who is really protected. The colonizing project, as being in the interests of, for the good of, and as promoting the welfare of the colonized, reflects, as Narayan expressed it a few years before Operation Enduring Freedom began, the missionary position, which supposes that "only Westerners are capable of naming and challenging patriarchal atrocities committed against Third-World women" (Narayan 1997: 57).

Who has the privilege of speaking "when veils seem more like walls", as Royster puts it, is an issue more important than the veiling of bodies. The interest in and the foregrounding of burqa-clad, apparently voiceless, Afghan women was applied as part of a rationale for once again waging a just war and securing Afghan women (Stabile & Kumar 2005). Orford warns that we cannot usefully respond to the silencing of the "subaltern" woman by "representing" that figure, or by constructing her as a speaking subject (Orford 2002). Even when undertaken with "good intentions", the attempt to rewrite the Third World as the subject of a reconfigured, decolonized Law cannot succeed. No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been an incommensurable, discontinuous other into a domesticated other that consolidates the imperialist self (Ashcroft et al. 1995; Spivak 2001; Loomba 2005).

The US/UN-led hopes for a "security" and gender agenda were soon dashed as ordinary citizens were faced with increasing insecurity and rampant corruption. This disillusionment did not create but helped to fuel a revitalized Taliban insurgency and to eliminate the moderate elements of the Taliban who were once willing to renounce violence. Coleman (2010) and Abirafeh (2009) see the "saving-of-brown-women-from-brown-men" scenario both as a crucial mistake and a symptom of Western "othering" (see also Cooke 2002; Joya 2006, 2009). There are ways to promote women's empowerment without undermining men. Just as the politics of "othering" has transformed the women of Afghanistan into faceless victims, so has the claim that they were representatives of a seamlessly unified culture. The notion that the women of Afghanistan could be as diverse and as deeply politicized as their male counterparts has been beyond Western view—the Norwegian is no exception.

By rendering Afghan women "the passive grounds for an argument aimed at imperialist domination, the discourse of protection used by politicians and media alike—denied women any agency in decision-making process that affected their daily lives and futures", Stabile and Kumar write (2005: 770; see also Ansari 2008). According to Motha, "the unfolding of the emancipatory politics of the claim to autonomy of women, in its universalization as an absolute, becomes an unconditional demand that sweeps away any claim that does not fit with the ideal" (Motha 2007: 146).

The attributing of injustice against poor women in poor countries to traditional local culture might sometimes be foregrounded, but to do so in order to legitimate military occupation is more often than not an oxymoron. The liberal feminist war/security rhetoric, as part of the "war on terror" rhetoric, is built along oxymoronic lines, at the cost of women's liberation. To see cultures as "self-contained or autonomous without also noting the ways in which their traditions have been and

continue to be shaped by Western interventions" is, according to Jaggar, to omit important aspects of Western global dominance (Jaggar 2005: 50). Jaggar's use of the term cultural Western "essentialism", i.e. the tendency to characterize whole cultures as internally homogeneous and nearly externally sealed, is, as most readers will know, only two among many other feminist voices heard and listened to, aiming to avoid "essentialism" (see also Chowdhry 2007; Motha 2007).

Connecting her perspectives to Afghanistan, the Taliban, and various Afghan tribal cultures, Jaggar's focus on the injustice against and oppression of poor Afghan women is of particular relevance. She insists that such traditions, too, should be seen in a broader geo-political and geo-economic context. Afghan cultures' interaction and interpenetration with today's global (dis-)order represent an aspect of the absent presences in the Norwegian narratives. The rhetoric of silence, and the silencing of "the other", is a particularly effective weapon and a must for *doxa* to be kept sufficiently large. Given that all discourse, all language, serves a certain ideological function in seeking to persuade us of the commonsensical, natural, necessary meaning of the world, feminist rhetorical criticism represents a political intervention to the extent that it offers an intellectual engagement with ideology and critically interrogates the social construction of gender norms as concomitant with social, economic, and political forms of gender inequality.

It is, however, easy to see the point made by Carol Cohn, who says: "At this point, letting (some) women into decision-making positions seems a small price to pay for leaving the war system essentially undisturbed. 1325 has the potential to have tremendously important effects on the lives of women who are already being ripped apart in the clutches of war" (Cohn 2004: 19). The Norwegian "colonial innocence" and the position the countries of the Nordic region have obtained as "gender equal" societies illustrate, however, that the potential effects of the resolution are anything but positive within today's "war on terror".

The remarkable spread of feminist ideas throughout the UN system illustrates the productivity that can flow from the institutional embrace of "emancipatory" ideas, in the form of institutional developments as well as inspiring local and global movements for change. At the same time, the Security Council resolutions illustrate a number of major problems for feminists, which have emerged from increased institutional incorporation. Gender mainstreaming strategies, constantly under-funded and institutionally marginalized, may prove to be politically ineffective as a means of achieving equality between men and women. To swim against this current without drowning is, however, a difficult discipline.

The Afghan war came, so to speak, as a package containing a celebration of neo-liberalism, modernity, and democracy—juxtaposed with the liberation of Muslim women from "brown men" as part of on-going civilizing missions elsewhere in the world. Cynthia Enloe's phrase, "statesmen protecting womeandchildren" (1999), is still relevant, but these days "statesmen and stateswomen protecting womenandchildren" might have some relevance too (Ferguson 2005; Lippe 2007). The Norwegian philanthropic war/security rhetoric analysed in this article differs only on a superficial level from the perspective seen in Rudyard Kipling's well known poem, "The White Man's Burden", written in 1889. It was a response to the Spanish-American war and the heavy burden shouldered by Great Britain to save the world's others: "Take up the

White Man's burden/Send forth the best ye breed/Go bind your sons to exile/To serve the captives' need". These days, one might add: "Go bind your daughters to exile", "bound" by statesmen as well as some stateswomen. The white man's burden has, to some extent, become the white woman's burden too.

Rhetoric may also be seen as a tool used in the management of chaos—in this case the chaos, killings, and oppression of most people in Afghanistan, first and foremost women (and children). This kind of rhetorical management is still performed by orientalist, gendered imaginations, reaching neither "hearts" nor "minds" (Ansari 2008).

Note

[1] ESDP, the European Security and Defence Policy, is a major element of the Common Foreign and Security Policy pillar of EU and is the domain of EU policy covering defence and military aspects.

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